The Connecticut Warbler

The Journal of The Connecticut Ornithological Association

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The state's CBC continue to produce valuable data.
The spring season offered a nice array of rarities.
Identifying juvenile terns comes down to the details.

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ON THE COVER

Loggerhead Shrike

This Loggerhead Shrike, a remarkable find at the end of May at Sandy Point in West Haven, was photographed by Paul Smith. Once a regular visitor to Connecticut, it is now very rare.

The 2024-2025 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count

By Stephen P. Broker

Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were one of the species occurring in record numbers, with noteworthy gains along the coast, during the 2024-2025 Christmas Bird Counts. (Bruce Finnan)

Introduction

A series of previous efforts have been made to make sense of the changing population trends of early winter birds on our Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts. In The Connecticut Warbler, Volume 2, Number 1, pp. 5-7. 1982, Fred Sibley wrote about "Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts 1900 to 1909: The First Decade." In the April 1989 issue of The Connecticut Warbler, Fred Sibley and Steve Broker discussed the occurrence of waterfowl, raptors, game birds, shore birds, woodpeckers, winter finches, feeder birds, and southern birds as recorded on the 1988-89 CBC.

In the July 1995 Connecticut Warbler article by Sibley and Broker, "Christmas Counts 1970-1994: A 25 Year Comparison," Fred wrote the following: "Each year for many years the authors have tried to find meaning in the leftovers from the great

annual party called the Christmas Bird Count. Long after your friends have tired of hearing how you and you alone have paused to pursue a strange twitter in the reeds and came up with the first ever Yellow-backed Orange Twitter, the compilers are still counting one towhee, two towhee, three towhee, four. The compilers are also refusing to answer their phones, mail and requests from friends to finish the count. As a result your authors have unlimited time to concoct fanciful theories while waiting for that last count to arrive. Steve extracted "The 1994-95 Conclusion(s)" for the last issue of The Warbler. This article is some of what didn't fit in the last issue."

Dwight Smith and Bettina McKay published an article in the July-August 1984 issue of American Birds. They summarized their statistical analysis of Eastern Screech-Owls and Great Horned Owls by stating, "Correlation analyses showed that measures of effort but not weather variables were significantly correlated with the numbers owls counted. Highest correlations were with number of observers and number of parties for the most common or most readily located owl species while less common owl species showed highest correlation with number of owls or party miles, indicating that parties may expend additional time and effort in locating certain owls."

My recent Connecticut Christmas Bird Count review articles have taken a thematic approach. For the 2018-19 CTCBC (The Connecticut Warbler, October 2019), I provided some background on the earliest reviews printed in The Connecticut Warbler, by Dennis Varza, Joe Zeranski, Fred Sibley, and my own initial efforts at summarizing the important features of each CTCBC year.

The following year, two essential articles were published in leading national journals. "Decline of the North American Avifauna" was published on September 19, 2019 in the journal Science by Ken Rosenberg et al., documenting a 50-year change in the continent's increasing and decreasing bird populations. "Cumulative loss of nearly three billion birds since 1970, across most North American biomes, signals a pervasive and ongoing avifaunal crisis." The next day, Elizabeth Penissi's news article, "Billions of North American Birds have vanished," summarized Rosenberg's technical article in Science. "North America's birds are disappearing from the skies at a rate that's shocking even to ornithologists. Since the 1970s, the continent has lost 3 billion birds, nearly 30% of the total, and even common birds such as sparrows and blackbirds are in decline, U.S. and Canadian researchers report this week in Science."

The highly disturbing results of the Rosenberg study were preceded by an article in Ecosphere (an Ecological Society of America open access journal), published on May 24, 2016. Rosenberg cited this earlier article in his 2019 article in Science. The Ecosphere article, "Population trends for North American winter birds based on hierarchical models," made use of National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count continent-wide results. This article was co-authored by Geoff LeBaron, who for many years headed up the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count.

Common Grackles ranked 10th among the top 20 species in numbers reported during 2024-2025. (Bruce Finnan)

"Long-term, large-scale monitoring studies, often carried out by citizen scientists, provide invaluable data on bird and other wildlife populations for conservation and management activities. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC), conducted annually since 1900 and managed by the National Audubon Society since the formation of the organization in 1905, constitutes the longest-running, and is among the geographically most widespread, surveys of bird life in the world." I discussed the implications of these three key studies in the October 2020 issue of The Connecticut Warbler.

In the 2020-21 review article (The Connecticut Warbler, October 2021), I compared the North American data from the three articles above to the last 50 years of early winter bird populations, evidenced in our Connecticut Christmas Bird Count data. Long-time CTCBC participants have seen that a number of bird species in Connecticut and adjacent states have gone through exponential growth in their early winter populations since the 1960s and 1970s, while some other species have been in major decline. I wrote, "First, let's consider the contribution of Christmas Bird Counts to the Rosenberg, et al. study of the decline of the North American avifauna.

Only a portion of the data sets on bird populations under study in the Science article derived from analysis of Christmas Bird Counts, those spanning the years 1966 to 2013. The Ecosphere article indicated that those species at greatest risk of population decline include larger bodied taxa, those occupying higher trophic levels, species with longer life spans, producing fewer eggs per clutch, and later age at sexual maturity. A trial set of ten species examined in the study included Turkey Vulture, Great Egret, Dunlin, Virginia Rail, American Robin, Cedar Waxwing, Pine Siskin, and three species never found on Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts."

In 2021, British biologists Alexander Lees and James Gilroy published a fascinating book, "Vagrancy in Birds" (Princeton University Press). Lees is a senior lecturer in biodiversity in the UK and a lab associate of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Gilroy is lecturer in ecology at the University of East Anglia. I used their lengthy discussion of vagrancy in providing an overview of the 32 species of vagrant birds that have been recorded on Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts over the previous 40 years (The Connecticut Warbler, October 2022). "Each of the following species known for their vagrancy and having occurred on a Connecticut Christmas Bird Count is discussed in the context of the conditions under which they exhibit vagrancy." These CTCBC vagrants included rare western or Eurasian geese, ducks, grebes, hummingbirds, Purple Gallinule, Pacific Loon, White Ibis, Gyrfalcon, western tyrant flycatchers, Boreal Chickadee of the northern boreal forest, Cave Swallow, Bohemian Waxwing, thrushes, Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Pine Grosbeak, several sparrows, Yellow-headed Blackbird, wood-warblers, Western Tanager, Black-headed Grosbeak, and Painted Bunting.

The 2022-23 CTCBC review article (The Connecticut Warbler, October 2023) included a brief history of the NAS Christmas Bird Count, beginning with Frank Chapman's call in Bird-Lore magazine for a nationwide Christmas Bird Census in 1900, "an environmental call to arms to try to save our vanishing avian wildlife." Chapman wrote, "It is not many years ago that sportsmen were accustomed to meet on Christmas Day, 'choose sides,' and then, as representatives of the two bands resulting, hie them to the fields and woods on the cheerful mission of killing practically everything in fur or feathers that crossed their path - if they could. We are not certain that the side hunt is wholly a thing of the past, but we feel assured that no reputable sportsman's journal of today would venture to publish and account of one, unless it were to condemn it; and this very radical change of tone is one of the significant signs of our times."

In this same review article, I referred to Fred Sibley's 1982 TCW write up, "Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts 1900 to 1909: The First Decade." Fred wrote that "[c]ounts varied greatly in quality and many were little more than backyard counts. Censuses were taken in seven of the present day (1982) count circles but only those in Waterbury, New Haven, and Westport went beyond the backyard but

even here counts of less than ten species and less than 100 individuals were regular."

Bird-Lore was succeeded by Audubon Field Notes in publishing CBC results, and later, by American Birds. Following the formation of the Connecticut Ornithological Association in 1980, several writers have summarized the results of all Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts nearly every year since. In 1980, our state held 15 different counts. The number of counts grew to 17 by 1990. For the past several years, we have hosted 20 or 21 different counts during the allowable calendar dates of December 14 to January 5. The total number of count participants and total party hours have remained fairly consistent during these recent years.

Finally, in the 2023-24 review article (The Connecticut Warbler, October 2024), I expanded on the history of the developing Christmas Bird Count movement. "[Initially,] Frank Chapman listed a minimum number of requirements in submitting Christmas Bird Count reports, including the location of the count, weather conditions, bird species found, and numbers of individuals for each species. Today, the data collection expected for Christmas Bird Counts includes the low and high temperature ranges, wind direction, wind velocity, snow depth, still water, moving water, A.M. and P.M. cloud cover, A.M. and P.M. rain, and A.M. and P.M. snow. Also, start times and end times of the count must be submitted, as well as effort in the field, effort at feeders, and nocturnal birding (hours, distance, miles)."

Follow the Money? Follow the Food!

These previous CTCBC review articles have included discussions of weather conditions during the several months leading up to count period, such as warm or cool fronts, major storms, rain or drought, and snow cover. During the past five or six years, I have thought about addressing the food requirements of our early winter birds. This task seemed rather daunting, as we have recorded more than 260 different bird species on our counts since 1950. Even when one considers a single year of CBC bird species found, this involves looking at the foraging preferences of 150 or more species. The topic is complicated further by the fact that the food sources on birds' breeding grounds often are different from those of birds in migration or birds on their wintering grounds.

Each CBC year, several of our count compilers submit summaries of their count results. Jay Kaplan is most consistent in such reports. Here are two samples of his observations on available food items within the count circle. For the 2023-24 CBC, he wrote: "The increase in Herring Gulls is directly tied to the current conditions of holding trash on Murphy Road in Hartford until it can be incinerated or shipped out of state." From the 2022-23 CBC: "While a count day storm may certainly impact participation and birds seen that day, the November-December weather leading up to the count also plays a major role in determining the movements of migrants that may or may not linger into early winter. Seed and berry crops also determine numbers,

A Peregrine Falcon pair feeds on a Common Grackle at a nest site in New Haven. The grackle was captured by the adult male (left), which brought the avian prey to the ledge. The adult female (right) came to the ledge and took the grackle away from the male. (Steve Broker)

especially when it comes to sparrows and birds like cedar waxwing."

Two articles have been published in The Connecticut Warbler on the diets of owls. Geoff Hammerson wrote "Diet of Common Barn-Owl in Middlefield, Connecticut" (Hammerson. 1988). The owl pellets came from a Middlesex County barn, the nest site of Barn Owls observed and banded by our dear friend, George W. Zepko. Geoff wrote, "I examined a sample of the [disarticulated bones and fur] and identified food items using diagnostic skull and tooth characteristics. I counted, as a single individual, any food item represented by either an intact skull or by a skull remnant with both maxillae present." The Barn Owl was consuming 78% Meadow Vole, 17% Short-tailed Shrew, 4% Star-nosed Mole, <1% Meadow Jumping Mouse, <1% Norway Rat, <1% White-footed Mouse, and <1% an unidentified bird. This information is extremely helpful in understanding how birds are staying alive in Connecticut during our CBC seasons.

I am part way through the dissection of more than 500 discrete pellets at a New Haven County roost site for Long-eared Owls. The pellets were collected from 2017

to 2019 (Broker. unpublished) I have each dissected pellet isolated in a small plastic covered dish, preserving rodent complete skulls, occipitals, mandibles, appendicular bones, seeds, and bird beaks and feathers. The minute vertebral disks from avian prey also have been collected. My preliminary studies indicate that these Long-eared Owls are feeding heavily on Meadow Voles, with a small number of Short-tailed Shrews ("red-toothed shrews"), and other rodents. I have found that when there has been heavy snow cover on the ground, the Long-eared Owls switch to feeding on birds, including Northern Cardinals and sparrows.

Fortunately, I have been newly inspired by two journal or magazine articles that have been published this year. The first is John Kricher's nice article, 'Saying Thank You to a Wayward Towhee (and to David Lack)" in the June 2025 issue of Bird Observer. Kricher describes his enjoyment in watching a vagrant Spotted Towhee at the Race Point Airport in Provincetown, Cape Cod. Kricher writes that " [I]n the mid-twentieth century, ornithologists, and one in particular, grasped the profound significance of food in structuring bird communities. The key insights in this thought renaissance were provided by David Lack of Oxford University, then the preeminent ornithologist of Great Britain. In 1954 Lack published a seminal book titled "The Natural Regulation of Animal Numbers." At the time of Lack's studies, ecologists were debating which environmental factors were most influential in determining animal population densities. [Lack] was a proponent of density dependent population regulation. "[T]he density of a population is a function of the availability of resources (not limited to food but including such variables as nest site availability."

Kricher continues, "Which brings me to a wayward Spotted Towhee, a western vagrant species that came in for a landing on November 16, 2024 at the Provincetown Airport (or at least that was the first reported sighting of it.}" Kricher and a birding friend made several visits to the airport parking lot and, following the lead of someone who had put down bird seed for the Spotted Towhee, enjoyed views of this western towhee from their car blind. "We were the only birders present, as by then it was over a month since the towhee was first seen and most birders who wanted to see it had presumably made the P-town pilgrimage and gotten their 'towhee tick'".

This Cape Cod sighting of a rarity from the west is triply interesting to me. In recent years, I have been reading about David Lack, including his books "Darwin's Finches" (Cambridge University Press, 1947), The Natural Regulation of Animal Numbers (Oxford University Press, 1954, 1967), "Enjoying Ornithology" (Methuen & Co LTD, London, 1965), and "Ecological Adaptations for Breeding in Birds" (Methuen, 1968). I've also read his biography, "The Life of David Lack: Father of Evolutionary Ecology" by Ted R. Anderson (Oxford, U.K./New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Anderson writes, "[T]he results of Cambridge doctoral student John H. Crook were to inspire David Lack to undertake a comprehensive study of the ecological correlates of breeding behaviors in birds. The results were published in Lack's second most frequently cited work, "Ecological Adaptations for Breeding in Birds," which was published in 1968 by Methuen. Lack chose seven breeding characteristics for his comparative analysis: nesting dispersion, pair bond, clutch size, egg size, incubation period, nestling period, and age at first breeding. He also separated the birds into six ecological groups for analysis."

Curiously, only two Spotted Towhees have known occurrences in Connecticut. The first sighting occurred at Groton Long Point on the December 31, 2005 New London CBC. That bird remained at an improvised ground feeding station until at least the following mid-February. The second sighting occurred this year at Bluff Point State Park on the December 28, 2024 New London CBC. In each of these instances, the lingering vagrant towhee was seen by numerous birders, largely because the bird came into view to forage on seed scattered by the birding community.

The second article appeared in the July 2025 issue of Birding Magazine. David Leatherman of Fort Collins, Colorado wrote a nifty piece entitled "The Avian Bioblitzers of Weld County: Impaled Prey of Loggerhead Shrikes on Colorado's Northeastern Plains. Leatherman is a retired forest entomologist and a life-long birder. He writes that "shrikes have been providing credible information on 'what lives where' long before the term 'bioblitz' came into usage." He notes that impaling prey on barbed wire fencing is a shrike art form, as "masterful impaling secures prey in a way it cannot wriggle free but keeps it fresh."

The photos which accompany this recent Birding Magazine article, combined with speculations generated over the past decade, provide an overview of loggerhead shrike impaling habits in the western Weld Co., Colorado, portion of the Pawnee National Grassland. Leatherman has been driving transects across the Central Plains Experimental Range and collecting a statistical record of shrike-impaled redshank grasshoppers, speckle-winged rangeland grasshoppers, long-horned beetles, blister beetles, lesser earless lizards, greater short-horned lizards, many-lined skinks, Plains garter snakes, Plains spade foot toads, ground beetles, rainbow scarabs, bumble flower beetles, Brewer's Sparrow, bird gizzards, Ord's kangaroo rat, camel crickets, Hunt's bumble bee, digger bees, nursery-web spiders, and Brown-headed Cowbird eggs. Such specificity!

Loggerhead Shrikes have been recorded 42 times on Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts since 1950, with a maximum of 4 shrikes in a given year. The last year that we found a Loggerhead Shrike on a CBC was in1984, followed by a forty-year near complete cessation in their occurrence in the Northeastern U.S.. Still, this Colorado

effort has proved to be an ingenious way to study the food sources on which birds rely.

The Finch Research Network and its Winter Finch Forecast

Birders have a wonderful source of information on the irruptive boreal forest bird species that periodically show up on Connecticut Christmas Bird Counts. It is the Winter Finch Forecast of the Finch Research Network. Our irruptive species that show up in Connecticut include Rough-legged Hawk, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Evening Grosbeak, Pine Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Common Redpoll, Red Crossbill, White-winged Crossbill, and Pine Siskin. One recent Winter Finch Forecast (August 6, 2024), entitled Red Crossbills and the Cone Crop - Northeast, states "Crossbills start moving around, more come May-June looking for the next developing cone crops. Unlike the White-winged Crossbill, Red Crossbill is able to use a much wider variety of conifers to meet their energy requirements for nesting. This is due to the species having a stronger jaw musculature. They can get at seeds from soft-coned conifers such as spruces (red and white) and hemlocks, the semi-soft coned Eastern White Pine, and hard-coned pines (red, jack, pitch, Scotch, Japanese black pines. Overall, this was a great cone cycle year July 1 - June 30) for Red Crossbills in New

Wintering American Robins thrive on a variety of fruits and berries. Here one gorges on a cold-weather favorite, the seeds of Staghorn Sumac. (Abby Sesselberg)

Participants in CBCs read with interest the annual Winter Finch Forecast, which this year suggests Red Crossbills may be on the agenda. (Bruce Finnan)

York and Northeast." The above studies and others shown below provide a nice source of dietary information on what keeps our CBC season birds alive.

A Short History of Bird Stomach Contents Studies

Many of the early studies of bird stomach contents were carried out by researchers concerned about the economic impacts of foraging birds on important agricultural crops (McAtee, 1912; Kalmbach, 1934). "By 1916, the Bureau of Biological Survey had collected and analyzed the contents from more than 60,000 bird stomachs, which they used to determine whether each of the 400 species they studied was, on balance, helpful or harmful to man. Researchers divided the stomach contents into "good," "bad," and "neutral" categories, based on whether the partially-digested bug and plant matter was beneficial or harmful to farmers. By the 1940s, economic ornithology had become discredited and obsolete. Effective and affordable pesticides had entirely replaced the birds' bug-killing role, while economic ornithologists could never prove that their methods actually increased the number of helpful birds. But before their role in agriculture was dismissed, there was a time when we believed that we depended on birds for our food, and for our very survival." (Bird History, https://birdhistory.substack.com/p/economic-ornithology)

Arthur Cleveland Bent's series of publications on the "Life Histories of North American Birds" (Smithsonian Bulletins, 1919-1968) was an important source of anecdotal information on bird diets. Later, Martin et al. 1951, "American Wildlife & Plants: A Guide To Wildlife Food Habits" provided an encyclopedic record of the foods eaten by waterbirds, marsh birds and shorebirds, upland gamebirds, songbirds, and birds of prey. In 1988, Ehrlich et al. published "The Birder's Handbook." This very useful resource uses a simple icon system of bird foraging habits (e.g., probes, ground gleans) and preferred foods (e.g., seeds, greens, aquatic invertebrates, vertebrates, small mammals) for North American Birds. In 2020, Kim Long published a book titled "What Birds Eat: How to Preserve the Natural Diet and Behavior of North American Birds" (Seattle: Skipstone Books/Mountaineers Books, 368 pp.). The book provides bird diet profiles and sections on birds consuming insects, plants, and animals (rodents, other birds, aquatic prey, amphibians and reptiles, carrion, garbage dumps).

"Birds of the World," the subscription website developed and updated by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, provides important information on the breeding ground and wintering ground diets of all North American birds, including resident bird species, regional migrants, and long distance migrants that fly south across the Gulf of Mexico to Mexican, Central American, and South American wintering grounds.

The single most important publication on the ecology of Connecticut is "Connecticut Wildlife: Biodiversity, Natural History, and Conservation," by Geoffrey A. Hammerson. Geoff's remarkable book starts with an overview of the Connecticut landscape and the seasons, followed by chapters devoted to Connecticut's ecosystems (estuarine, riverine, lacustrine, palustrine, and upland terrestrial, including deciduous forests, coniferous forests, forest edges, fields and grasslands, suburban yards, and cities). Each of these chapters includes discussion of key conservation issues. Geoff then provides richly illustrated chapters on the diversity of life in Connecticut. There are separate chapters on algae, fungi, and lichens, nonvascular and vascular plants, invertebrates (worms, mollusks, spiders and mites, insects, crustaceans, and echinoderms), and vertebrates (fishes, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals). The chapter on birds includes individual species accounts for the various taxonomic groups, as well as the seasonal patterns of bird diversity, their habitat preferences, and life history strategies. The sections on food and feeding of birds are particularly insightful, including discussion of fruits and fruit-eating birds, fruit quality, competition, spring and autumn migration, waterbirds, raptors, and songbirds, including birds in winter. This combination of information on the diversity of life in the State and the particular feeding habits of birds is a great starting point for understanding the challenges faced by the early winter birds that we record on Christmas Bird Counts.

I am reserving for another article a more detailed overview of the diets of our Connecticut Christmas Bird Count species.

Highlights of the 2024-2025 Connecticut Christmas Bird Count.

Twenty-one count circles submitted results for this year's Connecticut Christmas Bird Count, including those that extend into Connecticut from centers in New York or Rhode Island. The designated time period of December 14 to January 5 annually assures that three weekends are on the calendar for the scheduling of any given count. This year, the first full weekend once again was heavily loaded with CBCs, as four counts were held on Saturday, December 14 (Lakeville-Sharon, Storrs, Woodbury-Roxbury, New Haven), and six additional counts took place on Sunday, December 15 (Hartford, Litchfield Hills, Oxford, Quinnipiac Valley, Salmon River, Greenwich-Stamford).

New Haven CBC compiler Chris Loscalzo wrote, "The highlights for the NH CBC were: Eurasian Wigeon (in Morris Creek in New Haven), Clapper and Virginia Rail, American Oystercatcher, American Woodcock, Wilson's Snipe, Clay-colored Sparrow (opposite the entrance to Sandy Point in New Haven), Lincoln's Sparrow (one at Maltby Lakes and another in Guilford), Yellow-breasted Chat (in a thicket along the Branford River) and a count week Pine Warbler."

Jay Kaplan always writes a comprehensive summary of the Hartford CBC. Here is what Jay wrote in his 2024 summary. "Consider this sentence from last year's (2023) summary. 'One of the more interesting aspects of this year's summary was a ten year high count for eighteen different species.' Well, this year, we reached ten year highs for 26 species! Bald eagle, red-shouldered hawk, and red-bellied woodpecker have continued to increase as year round residents. Some of the sparrow increases, notably juncos and swamp sparrows, were significant, and I would suspect may be tied to a good seed crop. Seven marsh wrens were counted in Glastonbury - an extraordinary number for a bird that has never numbered more than two. Finally, the crow roost seems to be expanding. Our final count of 21,000 is an estimate. If you want to see lots of crows, check out the roost on the Hartford/West Hartford line some evening at dusk. They will likely be there for another two months. How many crows do you think travel to this roost, the largest in Connecticut?

"Unusual species this year included a cackling goose at Goodwin Park in Hartford, greater and lesser scaup at the Farmington Avenue Reservoir #1, an American coot at Batterson Pond, a lesser black-backed gull at Wethersfield Cove, killdeer in Glastonbury and East Hartford, the Glastonbury marsh wrens, a gray catbird and an eastern towhee in West Hartford, and a purple finch in the Rocky Hill meadows. Other than the single purple finch, winter finches did not make an appearance in our area in mid-December. Three species have now been removed from the ten-year list as they have not been reported since 2014. These include red-breasted merganser, American woodcock and common loon. In addition to American goldfinch, the other species to hit a ten-year low was Rock pigeon."

Co-compiler Sharon Dellinger wrote of the Salmon River CBC, held on Sunday, December 15, "Doreen [Jezek] and I finished up our compiling for the 50th Annual Salmon River Xmas Count on 1/13/2025 and submitted our data to NAS. As we expected, this was a phenomenal year! We had 42 folks in the field and 11 feeders that were surveyed. I've attached our summary report which shows 84 species on count day. Some highlights: a Snowy Owl near Goodspeed. Never seen in the history of this count circle! We had 4 Red-headed Woodpecker. Highest ever counts of Yellow -bellied Sapsucker at 38 individuals. We truly appreciate everyone's participation. This count could not happen without each of your efforts."

CTGS compiler Cynthia Ehlinger posted a count summary to ctbirds. She wrote, "With still a few reports to come in, the Greenwich-Stamford Christmas Bird Count held on Sunday, December 15 tallied 106 species (with a potential 107 awaiting photo confirmation and 7 count week birds to date). The prize for best bird may have to go to the accommodating Grasshopper Sparrow at Greenwich Point Park, which was still there today [December 16]. Other highlights on count day included Snow Goose, Northern Pintail, Surf and White-winged Scoters, Greater Yellowlegs, Laughing Gulls, a few Northern Saw-whet Owls, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Gray Catbirds, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, Rusty Blackbird, and Eastern Phoebe. Count week birds were Black Scoter, Northern Gannet, Black-crowned Night Heron, Razorbill, Bonaparte's Gull, Greater White-fronted Goose, and King Eider. Many thanks to all our counters and the Greenwich Audubon for hosting our potluck compilation dinner after the count."

Five counts followed on Sunday, December 22 (Barkhamsted, Norwich, Westport, Stratford-Milford, Napatree). Napatree CBC co-compiler Glenn Williams also submitted a summary to ctbirds. He wrote, "The Napatree CBC circle is half in coastal Connecticut, half in coastal Rhode Island, and extends far enough south to catch the eastern end of Fisher's Island [New York]. Thank you to everyone who went out into the brutal cold and wind today, especially the owlers and folks in exposed areas. A relatively new count, this was our 23rd effort." Glenn highlighted the top eighteen species found, providing interpretive comments and locations of the non-sensitive species. They included Painted Bunting, Eurasian Wigeon, Dickcissel, 5 owl species, Eared Grebe, Red Crossbill, Harlequin Duck, 4 Red-headed Woodpeckers, Snow Goose, and Yellow-breasted Chat. Concerning the owls, "Habitat loss is making [Long-eared Owl] more difficult to find every year."

New London chose to hold its count on Saturday, December 28 rather than waiting until the often chosen last Saturday in the allowable count period. Bristol and Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood rounded out the late December CBCs with their counts held

on Sunday, December 29. The Pawling, New York/Hidden Valley, Connecticut CBC continued a thirty-year tradition of been held on New Years Day. The remaining two counts were held on Saturday, January 4 (Guilford-Long Island Sound) and Sunday, January 5 (Old Lyme-Saybrook).

A statewide total of 799 field observers and 77 feeder watchers devoted nearly 2,200 total party hours and covered more than 8,130 total party miles in this annual census of early winter birds. In the process, we recorded 163 count day species, well below last year's total of 180 count day species. Five additional count week species were found statewide. The count week species were Greater White-fronted Goose at Greenwich-Stamford, a Pink-footed Goose, new to the Quinnipiac Valley count, Canvasback at Litchfield Hills and Stratford-Milford, Semipalmated Plover at New London, and Yellow-crowned Night Heron (notice the dropped second hyphen) at Stratford-Milford, the most likely place to find this species in early winter. The rare goose species are being found with greater frequency in recent years. Count week species are those seen during the three day period before or after any given CBC but missed statewide on all count days. The total number of birds counted this year were below last year's total of nearly 330,000 individuals, but this remains a solid total since a steady decline in European Starling numbers going back to 30-50 years ago. Last year's total of 180 count day species represented a new all-time record high species total for the Connecticut Christmas Bird Count.

Ten bird species were recorded at 30-year record high totals. Most significant of these were Wood Duck (102 counted at Litchfield Hills!), Red-shouldered Hawk (record numbers on northern, mid-state, and coastal counts), Red-headed Woodpecker (new highs mid-state and coastal), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (significant expansion into coastal count circles), Brown Thrasher (new high numbers of this semi-hardy species along the coast), Dark-eyed Junco (far and away the most abundant of our winter sparrows), Song Sparrow, and Eastern Towhee (80% found on the coast).

The four species with new 30-year low counts were Canvasback, Sanderling, American Woodcock, and Great Black-backed Gull. This is the first time that Canvasback missed being recorded as a count day species. As noted above, this seriously declining diving duck was found count week only at Litchfield Hills and Stratford-Milford. Last year, I reported at some length on the ongoing drop in Great Black-backed Gull numbers, which used to enjoy enhanced numbers at coastal and inland active landfills. The inland northern counts have seen the greatest decline in Great Blacked-backed Gull numbers, but this year's total found on coastal counts was a new record low count. The only American Woodcocks found were a count day bird at New Haven and count week birds at Greenwich-Stamford and Old Lyme-Saybrook. In the mid-1980s and early 1990s, so many as 20 to 25 American Woodcock were being recorded on Connecticut CBCs.

The 2024-2025 New London CBC produced two outstanding rarities. The Black-throated Gary Warbler (above Julian Hough) was at a waste water treatment plant in New London and the Spotted Towhee (below Steve Broker) was at Bluff Point State Park in Groton.

No new species were added this year to the 30-year statewide total. Seven stunning rarities were found. They include an Eared Grebe at Napatree, a Semipalmated Plover count week at New London, a Grasshopper Sparrow, completely new to the Greenwich-Stamford CBC, and a Spotted Towhee found at New London, as described above.

The additional rarities were a Black-throated Gray Warbler at New London, a Western Tanager at Old Lyme-Saybrook, and a Painted Bunting at Napatree. Black-throated Gray Warbler was last seen on a Connecticut Christmas Bird Count on January 5, 2003 at Old Lyme-Saybrook. Also noteworthy this year was a Sandhill Crane found at Woodbury-Roxbury.

The ten most abundant birds statewide were: Canada Goose (47,018 individuals); European Starling (33,629); American Crow (27,850 + a portion of 3,727 crow sp.); Dark-eyed Junco (23,622); Mallard (10,819); White-throated Sparrow (10,026); American Robin (9,872); American Herring Gull (8,417); Ring-billed Gull (7,999); Common Grackle (7,520). The next most abundant species were Blue Jay, House Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Rock Pigeon (feral pigeon), Song Sparrow, Mourning Dove, American Black Duck, and Common Merganser. These species ranged from roughly 7,400 down to 3,900 individuals.

The regional abundances (Northern CBCs, Mid-State CBCs, Coastal CBCs) follow fairly closely with the Statewide data. The most abundant species found in each region of the state include Canada Goose, European Starling, American Crow, Dark-eyed Junco, Mallard, and American Robin. Coastal counts, with their ameliorating temperatures, support many more early winter species in high numbers than do the inland ones. Brant, Greater Scaup, Common Eider, and Red-breasted Merganser occur effectively 100% along the coast. Several additional species are far more likely to be seen in coastal waters, accounting for at least 90% of statewide totals, including Bufflehead, American Herring Gull, and Great Black-backed Gull. Those species that shift south to the coast in early winter and account for more than 50% of the statewide total include American Black Duck, Hooded Merganser, Ring-billed Gull, Carolina Wren, House Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, and Song Sparrow. The Glastonbury American Crow roost on the Hartford CBC has the lion's share of crows in the state. Herring Gull numbers have declined significantly in the northern part of the state. Rock Pigeon (feral pigeon) and Herring Gull are less likely to occur Mid-State than in the north or along the coast. The above generalizations apply only to Christmas Bird Count results. Outside the CBC dates, rarities certainly do occur in inland portions of the state.

Hartford once again led all northern Christmas Bird Counts with 92 count day species. Storrs recorded 81 count day species, followed by Litchfield Hills with

Canvasback was one of four species with 30-year low counts, as for the first time it failed to be recorded as a count day species. (Frank Mantlik)

79 count day species. Among the mid-state counts, Norwich led with their record high total of 88 count day species, thanks to the addition of Green-winged Teal, Long-tailed Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Common Loon, Snow Bunting, and White-crowned Sparrow to their species total. The Norwich CBC now has been held for the past nine consecutive years. Woodbury-Roxbury tallied 85 count day species, and Salmon River had 84 different species on count day. The Atlantic and Long Island Sound waters in the Napatree circle produced a nice total of 128 count day species. New London reported 126 count day species, and New Haven tallied 121 count day species, just a shade below their 20 year average.

Weather during the Christmas Bird Count season

As the meteorologists say, the weather is always changing in Connecticut. Birders say the same. This year, the ten CTCBCs that were held during the first two weekends of the count period were not bothered by rain or snow fall. The field observers of just five of the later counts were birding under light rains: New London and Bristol, in the morning hours, Pawling/Hidden Valley in the afternoon, and Edwin Way Teale, Trail Wood throughout the day. The only light snow took place at New London during the A.M., mixed in with light rain following a week long drop in temperatures.

On Saturday, December 14, the three inland counts held experienced temperatures ranging from 9 to 12 degrees Fahrenheit to the mid- to high 30s. Hartford CBC compiler Jay Kaplan wrote: "I have said this in the past, but it is worth saying again that every Christmas Bird Count is different. Weather certainly plays a role and, in 2024, October and November were the fifth warmest months on record here in Connecticut (and the warmest on record nationwide). Things changed the first week of December as temperatures plunged below freezing, but it was not early or cold enough to freeze larger bodies of water. This may be why our 2024 count produced ten year high numbers for nine species of waterfowl. Another Count variable is food supply in the form of seeds, nuts and berries. This was more mixed as American goldfinch numbers fell to a ten year low, one of two species to do so. Perhaps the seeds utilized by goldfinches were in short supply, while other food sources were more plentiful, resulting in ten year highs for such diverse species as golden-crowned kinglet, white-breasted nuthatch and several sparrows. The warm fall temperatures no doubt, as mentioned previously, contributed to the increase in waterfowl. Our Count began on a chilly note with morning temperatures around the 15 degree mark, but it eventually warmed into the mid 30s, and wind was minimal."

The temperatures, as one would expect, started out somewhat higher along the coast. Inland still waters were frozen or partly frozen, but all coastal water bodies were open. Most of these counts took place under clear or partly clear morning skies and cloudy to partly cloudy afternoon skies. On Sunday, December 15, the north to south temperature cline continued to hold, with Litchfield Hills starting the day at a chilly 12 degrees, Oxford, Quinnipiac Valley, and Salmon River also quite cold, and Greenwich-Stamford a good jump higher at 27 degrees. All five of these counts ended the day with highs in the mid- to high 30s. Wind directions recorded by the various observers showed some shifts in direction.

The big temperature down swing took place during the following week. Barkhamsted's temperature ranged from a low of 0 degrees to a high of only 11. Even coastal Westport began the day at 5 degrees F.. The Norwich high was 26 degrees F.. Most December 22 counts had partly frozen still waters and open or partly frozen moving waters.

New London's December 28 count took place under difficult conditions, including the cloudy skies, light rain, and light afternoon snow fall. Bristol's December 29 count was held under temperatures from the mid 30s to the mid 50s and foggy or cloudy skies and light rain day long. Pawling's count on New Year's Day ranged from temperatures of the low 30s to high 40s, with all open waters, and cloudy skies. On January 4, Guilford-Long Island Sound enjoyed somewhat cooler temperatures, frozen or partly frozen non-coastal water bodies, and clearing skies by the afternoon. The Old Lyme-Saybrook CBC rounded out the 2024-25 schedule with temperatures holding from the day before, occasional strong wind gusts, partly frozen non-coastal waters, clear morning skies, and cloudy afternoon birding to finish the day.

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https://www.ctbirding.org/birds-birding/ct-bird-count-data/

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2024 Fall Hawk Watch

By Steve Mayo

Inland Sites

Each September, hawk watchers hope for northwest winds to bring large numbers of Broad-winged Hawks. The weather would not cooperate during this September migration window, and predictably, overall coverage hours were down. Booth Hill (W. Hartland) had 49 Broad-winged Hawks on 9/19 and only 60 for September. They finished with 88 raptors for the season. Botsford Hill (Bridgewater) did a bit better with 299 raptors for September. There were 246 Broad-winged Hawks and 174 of those were on 9/11. Johnnycake (Burlington) also had their high count on 9/11 with 107. Their September total of 380 included 192 Broadies as well as other species (Red-tailed Hawk, Turkey Vulture) that are typically considered late season migrants. After a 15-year hiatus, Peak Mountain (East Granby) had 7 hours of coverage over 3 days, with 25 Broad-winged Hawks on 9/28. Poquonock (Windsor) managed 28 total Broad-winged hawks. 183 raptors were counted during the impressive 113 hours logged from August to November. Only Chestnut Hill (Litchfield) had a taste of the good old days with 644 Broad-winged Hawks on September 22. Their September season total included 871 Broad-winged Hawks and 69 other hawks. Most New England, New York, and New Jersey sites posted low Broad-winged Hawk numbers.

Where were the Broad-wings? Numbers for sites in Texas, Mexico, and Panama were within recent average season totals. "Our" Broad-winged Hawks made it safely southward, but they just weren't over head. In September of 2023, the jet stream moved directly across our region, causing rains and northwest winds favorable for migration. Inland Connecticut sites logged thousands of hawks. In September 2024, the jet stream consistently stayed within Canada, resulting in low hawk counts throughout the northeastern United States (Bataly, 2025).

Broad-winged Hawk Season Totals – Inland Sites

	2023	**2024**
Booth Hill	486	60
Botsford Hill	4,868	246
Chestnut Hill	6,670	871
Johnnycake Mountain	721	192
Poquonock	384	28

Coastal Sites

Boothe Memorial (Stratford) contributed five hours of October coverage and tallied 177 hawks, including 104 Turkey Vultures on 10/10. Hoydens Hill (Fairfield) tallied 1,246 raptors over 53 late-season hours. Totals included 355 Turkey Vultures and 208 Red-shouldered Hawks. Even more impressive were eight Golden Eagles. To see these Canadian migrants, it's a matter of being in the right place (the further west in Connecticut, the better) at the right time (late October through early November). One would be hard-pressed to find another Northeastern US hawk watch that logged Golden Eagles at a rate of 0.15 per hour!

Quaker Ridge (Greenwich) amassed 97 hours of August coverage. Results for the month included 51 Osprey and 32 Broad-winged Hawks. Early September brought continued warm temperatures with light southerly, west and north winds. Light to moderate northwest winds came on 9/10 resulting in a push of 1,616 Broad-winged Hawks for the day. The next day brought light northeast winds and 381 more Broad-wings before winds kicked southeast. Total hawks were 1734 and 471 for 9/10 and 9/11, respectively. Another 104 Broad-winged Hawks were counted on 9/14, along with season-highs of 66 Osprey and 24 Northern Harriers. On 9/19 after the morning drizzle, the north winds and the Sharp-shinned Hawks prevailed. There were 163 Sharp-shinned Hawks and 44 American Kestrels that day, and another 251 Sharpies on 9/20 (the daily high count for the Northeast). On 9/21 there were 97 more, and the following day 81 Sharp-shinned Hawks and the season daily high of 35 Cooper's Hawks were tallied. Double-digit Sharpie numbers continued daily throughout most of October, and Quaker Ridge ended up with 2,069 for the season. Quaker Ridge is famous in the Northeast for massive November Red-shouldered Hawk flights. On November 13, 278 "Swamp Hawks" flew over the Greenwich watch in small groups. There were another 147 the next day. These 11/3 and 11/14 totals were record days for the Northeast. The season total of 932 Red-shouldered Hawks was below those of 2023 and 2022 (1,608 and 1,873, respectively), but was still impressive. The peak count of Turkey Vultures was 156 on 10/18, but double digit daily tallies continued into November and resulted in 2,740 for the season. There were 12 Golden Eagles for the 2024 season.

Lighthouse Park (New Haven) had no coverage in August, and as mentioned before, early September brought warm, uneventful, weather. Very strong northwest winds are needed to drive migrants off the ridges and hills and down to the coast and these winds were absent. In early September, Osprey are seen flying to the southeast, apparently migrating, but are often just fishing in the vicinity of the New Haven Harbor. By 9/14, 58 Osprey were considered migrants and were counted. On 9/19, northerly winds brought 84 Osprey, 160 Sharp-shinned Hawks, and 73 American Kestrel.

Lighthouse also had good numbers of Turkey Vultures starting in mid October and

Red-shouldered Hawks, such as the one seen above, are a species on the increase at Connecticut hawk watches. American Kestrels, like one seen below, are in steep decline as migrants at our hawk watches. (Abby Sesselberg photos)

resulting in 1,420 for the season. This 2024 season total was only slightly lower than the site record 1,781 the previous year. If Quaker Ridge is famous for November flights of Red-shouldered hawks, Lighthouse Park is notable for the October Cooper's Hawk flight. It is one of the best places in New England to study the differences between Cooper's Hawks and Sharp-shinned Hawks. In the hand, field marks are quite distinctive. These birds are no longer even considered the same genus. But in the field, at heights, these field marks evaporate. Lighthouse swept all Cooper's Hawk daily records this season (Bataly, 2025). Totals included 107 (10/18), 104 (10/5), 94 (10/16), and 93 (10/17). Site Sharp-shinned numbers were at a near record low. Northern coastal sites such as Lighthouse and Cadillac Mountain (Maine) have experienced a more drastic decline in Sharp-shinned Hawks than at other Eastern sites. The reason is unknown. In general, loss of habitat and prey species (insectivorous passerine declines, insect declines, use of Neonicotinoid pesticides), and pathogens such as West Nile Virus are implicated as reasons for the Sharp-shinned Hawk decline throughout the Eastern US (Oleyar, et al, 2025). Record low numbers for Osprey and American Kestrel also contributed to a paltry season total of 7,195. Only 2015 had a lower season total (6,780).

Additional data including daily, monthly, and seasonal summary reports may be obtained from the Hawk Migration of North America website, hawkcount.org.

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Connecticut Field Notes

By Greg Hanisek, Frank Mantlik

This Black-bellied Whistling-Duck, one of seven in the state in spring, was a loner on May 25 at Short Beach Park in Stratford. (Frank Mantlik)

Spring Season – March 31 to May 31, 2025

First reports for regularly occurring species included Black-billed Cuckoo – April 30 in Thomaston (JN); Yellow-billed Cuckoo – April 29 in South Windsor (DE); Common Nighthawk – May 12 in Redding (BW); Eastern Whip-poor-will – April 19 in Canton (JK); Chimney Swift – April 14 in Meriden (MD); Ruby-throated Hummingbird – April 16 in Stonington (DW); Sora – April 3 in Westport (TGr); American Oystercatcher – March 1 in Waterford (JJ); Piping Plover – March 8 in Stratford (AK); Spotted Sandpiper – April 16 in Lebanon (JSw); Solitary Sandpiper – Mar 30 in Madison (MZ, PG); Black Skimmer – April 25 in Milford (MB); Common Tern – April 23 in Westport (TGr); Green Heron – April 14 in East Lyme (MM).

Also Eastern Wood-Pewee – May 1 in New Haven (JAm); Least Flycatcher – April 22 in Fairfield (AK) and Bolton (DM); Alder Flycatcher – May 12 in Litchfield (BDe); Great Crested Flycatcher – April 18 in Redding (MP); Eastern Kingbird – April 20 in Chaplin (AL) and Preston (DP); White-eyed Vireo – April 18 in Waterford (JJ); Yellow-throated Vireo – April 22 in Greenwich (RM); Blue-headed Vireo – April 6 in Madison (m.ob.); Eastern Warbling Vireo – April 21 in Goshen (MGl); Red-eyed Vireo – April 15 in Madison (AA); Bank Swallow – April 20 in New Haven (JAm); Purple Martin – Mar 17 in Old Lyme (SW); Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – April 5 at several locations; Veery - April 22 in Greenwich (RC); Swainson's Thrush – April 30 in New Haven (m.ob.); Wood Thrush – April 21 in Stamford (TGv); Seaside Sparrow – Mar 31 in Madison (ML); Saltmarsh Sparrow – April 23 in Milford (PH); Orchard Oriole – April 20 in Hartford (JMe, PDe); Boat-tailed Grackle – March 1 in Stratford (ES).

Also Worm-eating Warbler – April 25 at several locations; Blue-winged Warbler – April 22 at several locations; Louisiana Waterthrush – Mar 29 in Canton (JK); Northern Waterthrush - April 18 at several locations; Black-and-White Warbler – April 6 in Madison (m.ob.); Tennessee Warbler – April 29 in Stamford (SMr); Nashville Warbler – April 21 in Avon (m.ob.); Hooded Warbler – April 23 in Ridgefield (AW); American Redstart – April 22 at several locations; Cape May Warbler – April 28 in Northford (CD); Northern Parula – April 18 in Fairfield (WG); Bay-breasted Warbler – April 30 in New Haven (AM); Blackburnian Warbler – April 24 in Torrington (BDe); Northern Yellow Warbler – April 17 at several locations; Chestnut-sided Warbler – April 24 in Stamford (BO) and Fairfield (BF); Blackpoll Warbler – April 30 in Greenwich (m.ob.); Prairie Warbler – April 22 in Avon (JW) and North Branford (GC); Black-throated Green Warbler – April 19 in Bloomfield (LL) and New Canaan (NC); Scarlet Tanager – April 22 in Greenwich (CEh); Rose-breasted Grosbeak – April 18 in Branford (CLe); Indigo Bunting – April 19 in Branford (CLe) and Hampton (RBe).

No longer unexpected, six **Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks** were in the Stamford Harbor area on May 17 (JC, m.ob.). One was at Short Beach Park in Stratford on May 25 (FM et al.). A wintering **Pink-footed Goose** was last seen on March 14 at Meadowood, near Simsbury (BMa et al.). A rare **Black Brant** was photographed at Milford Point on May 3 (CL, MV). A migrant flock of 260 Brant flew over Woodbury on May 17 (DS). Three Tundra Swans were at Blue Flag Meadow in Hampton to at least March 14 (JF et al.). A **Eurasian Wigeon** was a good inland find on April 12 at Little Pond in Litchfield (CB). More typical were wintering birds to mid-March in Stratford/Milford and in Norwalk (m.ob.).

The high count for the declining Canvasback was six on March 1-6 at Frash Pond in Stratford (AK, CH et al.) and six on April 6 at Sherwood Island SP in Westport (TGr et al.). A good count of 12 Redheads was made at Barnes Boat Launch in Enfield on

This handsome Wilson's Phalarope was easy to find May 10-13 at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. (Frank Mantlik)

March 3 (SG et al.). An immature male **King Eider** was at HBSP from April 25 to May 1 (CLi et al.). One to three **Harlequin Ducks** were at four locations, all coastal as expected, through at least April 2 (m.ob.). A nice count of 52 Black Scoters was at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison (hereafter HBSP) on March 16 (SMy). An excellent inland count of 18 Long-tailed Ducks was made at Highland Lake, Winsted, on March 30 (DH). Two **Barrow's Goldeneyes** were on the Connecticut River at Enfield, a reliable location, on March 2 (JMo), and two were at Lighthouse Point Park in New Haven on March 8 (AN).

A flight of 150 Common Nighthawks was noted on May 27 in West Cornwall (ZA). A **Common Gallinule** was at Bennett's Pond State Park in Ridgefield on May 25 (AF). Away from known or suspected breeding locations, single Sandhill Cranes were in New Milford on March 3 (BO) and at Little Pond in Litchfield on April 9 (AG). Single **Black-necked Stilts**, an increasingly regular visitor, were at Griswold Point and Black Hall River in Old Lyme on May 7-8 (SW et al.); and at Fairfield Country

Club on May 23 (JP et al.). An American Golden-Plover, uncommon in spring, was at Veterans Memorial Park in Norwalk on April 12 (ZS). There were two at Griswold Point in Old Lyme on 18-23 April (DM et al.), and singles at Sasco Beach in Fairfield on May 9 (AK, JWi) and at McKinney NWR in Stratford on May 17 (EB). The only Upland Sandpiper was a good find on April 29 at Glastonbury Meadows (AD). A flock of 28 Hudsonian Whimbrels was at Milford Point on May 28 (LO). A **Wilson's Phalarope**, uncommon but annual, was at HBSP on May 10-13 (MK, m.ob.). Of special interest given their steep decline, a flock of 20 Red Knots was mixed with about 40 Ruddy Turnstones on a gravel beach off the end of Cedar I. at HBSP on May 31 (FW). The first Pectoral Sandpiper report involved a good early count of five on March 18 at Silver Sands SP in Milford (GH).

Up to two Razorbills were off Waterford locations to at least March 19 (DP et al.). The only other report was of one off HBSP on March 9 (AG, JF et al.). A **Common (Kamchatka) Gull,** continuing from the winter season in Stamford, was relocated at Calf Pasture Beach in Norwalk on March 2 (ZS, m.ob.). There was also a report from West Haven on March 1 (JHo, PS). A **Common (European) Gull** was present March 5-22 in and around North Windham (JF, PR, m.ob.). Lesser Black-backed Gulls were widely reported along the coast. There was one inland report, from Hartford Reservoir No. 6 in West Hartford on March 15-16 (WK, SG). The only inland Caspian Tern was found on May 10 at Crystal L. in Ellington, where it consorted with the only Black Tern reported inland (CH). An early Forster's Tern was at Barn Island WMA in Stonington on April 11 (GK). A nice flock of 11 Red-necked Grebes was at Nepaug Reservoir in Canton on April 3 (WG, CH). A wintering **Eared Grebe** remained in Stonington harbor until at least March 23 (DP, m.ob.). One was at Burying Hill Beach and Sherwood Island SP in Westport from April 4-18 (ZS, m.ob.). A Red-throated Loon was inland at Bantam L. in Litchfield on May 17 (RN).

The first **White-faced Ibis** was found on March 30 in Clinton (RS), and up to two were present in Clinton/Madison through the season (m.ob.). Three Least Bitterns were reported at both Glastonbury Meadows on May 16 (AD) and at Raymond Brook Marsh in Amston on May 25 (PR). A handful of inland Black-crowned Night-Heron reports included two at Nod Brook WMA in Avon on April 8-9 (JK, et al.). Single Tricolored Herons were in the Stratford-Milford area on May 4-26 (MGr, m.ob.) and in Westport on May 17-24 (TGr et al.). The only **Western Cattle-Egret** was found on May 11 in Derby (LJ). An impressive roost of 54 Great Egrets was at Raven Park Pond in Stratford on April 8 (FM). A very early **Swallow-tailed Kite** soared over Little Pond in Litchfield on Mar 31 (RM). Others were in Easton/Monroe April 17 (JHu); in Hamden on April 25 (JSh); in New Haven on April 27 (JHo); at Lighthouse Point on May 13 (AM); and in Portland on May 30 (BDo). In addition to two known nesting sites, single Mississippi Kites were seen at ten locations scattered around the state May 8-26 (m.ob). An early Broad-winged Hawk was in Groton on April 9 (GWi). A count of 141 migrating Broad-wingeds was made

This Green-tailed Towhee, a fourth state record, cooperated with a 17-day stay starting on March 9 at Avalonia-Moore Woods in Mystic. (Dave Mathieu)

on April 15 in Windsor Locks (PDe). A Rough-legged Hawk was in South Windsor on March 1 (BMa).

An Olive-sided Flycatcher was early May 2 in Canton (RR). The first Yellow-bellied Flycatcher was reported on May 13 in Vernon (DM). A Cliff Swallow was very early on March 9 in Old Lyme (SW et al.). Philadelphia Vireo, typically sparse in spring, produced only three reports of singles – May 16 at Greenwich Point (CEh et al.), May 16-17 at Pine Creek, Fairfield (MW et al.), and May 23 at Sherwood Island (TGr). The bird of the season was a **Loggerhead Shrike** on May 30-31 at Sandy Point in West Haven (PS, MA, m.ob.). The state's fourth **Green-tailed Towhee** was at Avalonia-Moore Woods in Mystic on March 9-25 (JAt), m.ob.). A high count of at least three Yellow-breasted Chats drew attention to Trout Brook Valley Conservation Area in Easton on May 17 (LH).

An unusually high four **Prothonotary Warblers** for the season were singles present on April 22 in Hampton (PR); on May 3 in Nehantic SF, Lyme (SW); on May 4 at Trout Brook Valley (MC et al,); and on May 13 at Miles Sanctuary in Sharon (GWa). Single **Kentucky Warblers** were present on May 4-12 at Trout Brook (RC et al.);

on May 7 at Perry's Mill Pond in Fairfield (JP); on May 17 at Nepaug Reservoir in Canton (JMe); and on May 26-29 at Lake Saltonstall in East Haven (MA, m.ob.). A **Yellow-throated Warbler** was at Bent of the River Sanctuary in Southbury, a possible nesting spot, on April 25 through the end of the period (GS, m.ob.). The only other report was one on May 11 in Montville (DP). A late flurry of Canada Warblers produced reports from 15 locations on May 30-31 (m.ob.).

Four **Summer Tanagers**, all near the southwestern coast, were singles seen on April 29 in Westport (TGr et al.); on May 2 at Birdcraft Sanctuary in Fairfield (DC, m.ob.); on May 6 at Sellecks Woods in Darien (BMu); and on May 11 at Maltby Lakes in West Haven (JQ). **Blue Grosbeaks** were seen on May 5 at Sherwood Island (TGr); on May 13 in Montville (DP, SV); and at Trout Brook Valley on May 19 through period's end (LH et al.). The only Dickcissel was at Trout Brook Valley on May 15-19 (LH et al.).

Observers

Zack Adams, Anthony Albrecht, Julien Amsellem (JAm); Mark Aronson, Joe Attwater (JAt), Ed Bailey, Robert Beaumont (RBe), Nick Bonomo, Curtis Breuer, Robert Buck (RBu), Milan Bull, Michael Carpenter, John Cote, NJ Cotton, Richard Chmielecki, David Cox, Glenn Cummings, Andrew Dasinger, Carl de Boor, Paul Desjardins (PDe), Beau Doherty (BDo), Patrick Dugan, Mike DiGioia, Buzz Devine (BDe), Cynthia Ehlinger (CEh), Chris Elphick (CEl), Daniel Errichetti, Barry Fasciano, Adam Fasciolo, Jeff Fengler, Frank Gallo, William Generous, Susan Gowan, John Graham, Melissa Grauel (MGl), Tara Gravel (TGv), Alex Greatorex, Tina Green (TGr), Mark Grogan (MGr), Peter Grund, Greg Hanisek, Larry Havey, Phil Henson, Connor Hogan, Dorrie Holmes, Julian Hough (JHo), Jim Hunter (JHu), Lisa Jarosik, Jack Jerrild, Gail Kahover, Jay Kaplan, William Kelly, Aidan Kiley, Micky Komara, Ash Leffingwell, Carol Lemmon (CLe), Mike Lengle, Cody Limber (CLi), Chris Loscalzo, Larry Lunden, Andrew MacDonald, Ryan MacLean, Frank Mantik, Barry Marsh (BMa), Shaun Martin (SMr), Dave Mathieu, Steve Mayo (SMy), Jamie Meyers (JMe), Joanne Morrissey (JMo), Meghan Mongillo, Brendan Murtha (BMu), Russ Naylor, JoAnn Neddermann, Amanda Noelle, Linda Olsen, John Oshlick, Brian O'Toole, Maureen Patten, Dave Provencher, James Purcell, James Quarello, Robert Rimkoski, Steve Robey, Phil Rusch, Ed Sadowski, Zack Schonberger, Jannie Shapiro (JSh), Russ Smiley, Donna Rose Smith, Paul Smith, Joan Smyth (JSm), Glenn Somogie, Michele Sorensen, Jack Swatt (JSw), Marianne Vahey, Shori Velles, Dorothy Wadlow, George Wallace (GWa), Bruce Ward, Mary Walsh, Alan Welby, Forrest Wickman, Glenn Williams (GWi), Sean Williams, Julie Wilson (JWi), Jonathan Wright-Goodison (JWr), Sara Zagorski, Molly Zahn

Photo Challenge

By Julian Hough

In September, there is often an influx of juvenile terns, presumably from nearby breeding colonies, that join with the post-breeding birds at places such as Sandy Point in West Haven. It always presents a good opportunity to brush up on tern identification. In this Photo Challenge we have a bird that allows a close approach, but which species is it?

Common and Least are the most numerous breeding species in the state, but frequently both Roseate and Forster's Terns show up at this time. The former breed nearby at Falkner Island, while the latter species hasn't been proven to breed in Connecticut as far as I know. However, a worn adult feeding two flight-capable fledglings at Sandy Point in 2025 raises the question whether Forster's Tern bred there or this was just a wandering family group. Arctic Terns, usually summering first-alternate individuals, occur on southern Long Island and on the outlying islands of Cape Cod, Massachusetts but fail to enter the Sound and reach coastal Connecticut. Other than storm-driven, freak influxes in Spring that drive adults off their oceanic path, they are essentially unknown from Connecticut, not helped by their subtle plumage differences from Common Tern that still require a discerning eye.

So let's begin by aging our Challenge bird. There are no shortcuts to tern identification, so you should really "gen-up" on the differences between a juvenile and an adult so that you can begin to compare apples to apples. Juveniles of many families show clean fresh feathers of the same pattern and generation (i.e length). These feathers are often shorter and more rounded in shape compared with adults, which are often worn

and disheveled from the rigors of parenthood. First-alternate terns (one-year-old birds) occasionally return to breeding grounds to summer. They may appear similar to juveniles but with a more worn plumage and often more worn, blackish primaries which doesn't fit with our bird.

It's hard to tell in this pose, but the greater coverts all look fresh and pale-fringed. The primary tips all look fresh and the head pattern doesn't show an obvious complete black cap. So we are dealing with a fresh juvenile, but of which species? Compared to nearby Common Terns it appears the same size and not obviously smaller as a Least Tern would. Standing juvenile Forster's, Common, Arctic and Least Terns have pale orange bill bases and pale orange-flesh legs with a clean white forehead. Juvenile Roseate Terns have dark blackish-brown legs. So, just like that - on leg color alone - we know it's a Roseate Tern. Who knew it was that easy! The completely black bill and a finely streaked blackish forehead and crown gives Roseate's a characteristic "hooded" look that is well illustrated in the Challenge image.

On closer views, some further minutiae, that helps differentiate juvenile Roseate and Common are:

- The outer web to the outermost tail feather is blackish-gray in Common Tern and white in Roseate (both adult and juvenile). If the tern you are looking at has a dark outer edge of the outermost tail feather it isn't a Roseate.
- On Roseate, the tips to the secondaries and particularly the primaries are broadly edged white unlike in Common Tern.
- Roseate has a more contrasting and monochromatic mantle pattern formed by broad blackish "c" marks to the rear scapulars. In Common, the dark subterminal markings are less dark, and often the whole mantle feathers can be edged with ochre-brown.
- In flight, the outer primaries often contrast with a paler mid-wing panel in Roseates, while in Common Tern the whole wing tends to be a more even gray.

This classic juvenile Roseate Tern was photographed by myself at Sandy Point on Aug.17, 2020.

Next Challenge Photo

THE CONNECTICUT WARBLER

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Send manuscripts to the Editor. Style should follow usage in recent issues. All manuscripts receive peer review.

Illustrations and photographs are needed and welcome. High resolution images can be submitted via email. We can use good quality photographs of birds unaccompanied by an article but with caption including species, date, locality, and other pertinent information.

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